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Nominalization and focus constructions in some Kiranti languages

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1. Introduction: the SSTN pattern and internal-head relative clauses

It is well-known that in many if not most Sino-Tibetan languages relative clause and attribute/genitive markers are identical with nominalization devices and that sentences bearing such markers can also function as independent utterances (cf. Matisoff 1972, Kölver 1977, DeLancey 1989, Genetti 1992, Ebert 1994, Bickel 1995, Noonan 1997, etc.). This morphological convergence of syntactic functions, which we may dub the 'Standard Sino-Tibetan Nominalization' (SSTN) pattern,[1] is particularly prominent in some languages spoken in the eastern and southeastern part of the Kirant because these languages not only feature prenominal relative clauses, but also allow, albeit as a minor type, internally headed constructions. In the following examples from Belhare (1), Limbu (2), and Athpare (3), the prenominal constructions in (a) can each be paraphrased by an internal-head type in (b). The SSTN marker is *-hak* (with the allomorph ~ *-khak* after stops and deletion of /k/ word-finally) in Belhare and *-pa* (~ *-ba* after voiced segments) in Limbu. Athpare — and to a more limited degree Belhare too — uses number-differentiating articles in lieu of nominalizers. The article signals specific or definite reference of the relativized noun.[2]

(1) a. ŋka asen in-u-ŋŋ-ha pepar mann-har-e.
1s yesterday buy-3U-1sA-N cigarette finish-TEL-PT

b. ŋka asen pepar in-u-ŋŋ-ha mann-har-e.
1s yesterday cigarette buy-3U-1sA-N finish-TEL-PT
'The cigarettes I bought yesterday are used up.'

(2) a. dalo-o yuks-u-ŋ-ba sa: me-de?r-u.
basket-LOC keep-3U-1sA-N meat 3nsA-take-3U

b. dalo-o sa: yuks-u-ŋ-ba me-de?r-u.
basket-LOC meat keep-3U-1sA-N 3nsA-take-3U
'[The mice] took away the meat that I kept in the basket.'

(3) a. khan-na asen a-in-u-na meruba pu-metta-ŋ! <E146>
2s-ERG yesterday 2-buy-3U-ART goat look-CAUS-1s

b. khan-na asen meruba a-in-u-na pu-metta-ŋ!
2s-ERG yesterday goat 2-buy-3U-ART look-CAUS-1s
'Show me the goat you bought yesterday!'

In the (b)-examples, the head noun appears embedded within the relative clause. This is demonstrated by the fact that it is surrounded by material that undoubtedly belongs to the relative clause and plays no role whatsoever in the matrix.

Unlike prenominal relative clauses, circumnominal clauses have a fully saturated valence structure, i.e., there is no element missing from them. Therefore, they have exactly the same surface shape as nominalized clauses, which occur not only as embedded complements (4a) but also as independent sentences (4b) (from Belhare; parallel examples are found in Athpare and Limbu as well):

(4) a. maʔi-chi n-tai-kha[3] mund-itt-he-ŋ.
person-ns 3ns-come-NPT:N forget-ACCEL-PT-1sA
'I forgot that there are people coming.'

b. namniŋ chimmetniŋ ne-e yuŋ-yakt-a-ha.
last.year year.before.last.year here-LOC be-IPFV-SUBJ-N
'He used to live here some years ago.'

How, then, can we distinguish formally between nominalization and internal-head relativization and account for the different semantics associated with them?

The difference between embedded complements of the type exemplified by (4a) and relativization as in (1) through (3) is relatively straightforward and rests on the valence of the matrix predicate: if this predicate is subcategorized only for a propositional expression as is the case in (4a), the clause is understood as a complement and the main verb cannot agree with a noun in the embedded clause. Unlike its English translation, Belhare *munma* 'to forget' does not take referential complements:

(5) *maʔi-chi n-tai-kha mund-itt-he-ŋ-chi-ŋ.
person-ns 3ns-come-NPT:N forget-ACCEL-PT-1sA-nsU-1sA
'I forgot (about) the people who will come.'

If the matrix predicate is subcategorized only for referential expressions, by contrast, the nominalized clause is interpreted as an internal-head relative clause. In this case, the embedded clause is a referential NP that inherits person and number features from its head noun. Hence, the matrix verb can agree with these features:

(6) lambu-e gari-chi ŋ-koĩ-ŋa-ha chitt-he-m-chi-m-ma.
way-LOC car-ns 3ns-fall-INTR.PERF-N find-PT-1pA-nsU-1pA-e
'On the road, we came across cars broken down.'

While they are clearly different from complement clauses, internal-head relative clauses are much harder to distinguish from nominalized independent sentences, as exemplified by (4b). Indeed, why should we understand utterances like (1b) as a complex sentence where the reference of *pepar* 'cigarette' is being narrowed down, rather than as a sequence of two independent clauses: 'I bought cigarettes yesterday — they are finished'? And why shouldn't (6) be taken as the sequence 'cars broke down — I saw them'? Nothing in the surface shape of the sentences appears to tell the difference: here, the SSTN conflation pattern is carried out to its extreme as it were.

Impressionistically, a difference is established by intonational continuity, which one typically finds in embedded constructions but not across independent sentences. But this field is largely unexplored in the Kirant, and in this chapter I want to address a different issue. I want to explore what syntactic properties there are to differentiate between the relative-clause and the independent-sentence interpretation and what discourse functions we find associated with the latter. After reviewing the morphosyntactic differences between embedded (relative-clause) and non-embedded (independent) nominalizations in Section 2, I argue in Section 3 that the latter constitute focus constructions and discuss various uses of them in discourse. I base this argument on data from Belhare, but in Section 4 I undertake a comparison with Athpare and Limbu, suggesting that these languages carried the focus construction in further domains of usage. Section 5 closes the chapter by drawing together the results of the analysis.

2. Embedded vs. non-embedded nominalization

The most general syntactic difference associated with relative-clause and independent-sentence interpretation is that relative clauses always bear a specific function in a matrix clause. In (1) above, the relativized clause is the subject of an intransitive clause while in (6) it assumes the role of undergoer (or 'object'). Other functions are marked by case suffixes. The following illustrates internally-headed relative clauses functioning as transitive actor (7a), cause (7b), locative (7c) and genitive NPs (7d):

(7) a. asamba maʔi niu-s-u-ŋ-na-ŋa paisa khat-lott-he.
last.night person see-TRANS.PERF-3U-1sA-ART-ERG monney take-TEL-PT
'The person I've seen last night took away the money.'

b. iŋa m-phoiʔ-s-u-ha-ʔa a-taŋghek tuk-khar-e.
beer 3nsA-mix-TRANS.PERF-3U-N-ERG 1POSS-head hurt-TEL-PT
'I have a head-ache because of the (bad) beer that they mixed into it.'

c. dalo-chi kheŋ-bilat-kha-e cece yuŋ-s-u-ŋŋ-ha
basket-ns hang.up-PASS-N-LOC meat keep-TRANS.PERF-3U-1sA-N
ŋ-khat-lott-he.
3nsA-take-TEL-PT
'[The mice] took away the meat that I kept in the baskets that were hung up.'

d. na iŋa uŋŋ-het-t-u-m-na-hak-cha u-samet
DEM beer drink-TEMP-NPT-3U-1pA-ART-GEN-ADD 3POSS-soul(public)
phou-t-u-m.
raise-NPT-3U-1pA
'We also raise the samet of this beer that we are drinking now.'

The embedded nature of relative clauses also brings with it that they only allow a limited set of tense markers. Like complement or case-marked adverbial clauses, Belhare relative clauses are restricted to subjunctive mood in the past tense. This mood is marked by the suffix *-a,* which, however, systematically coalesces with the third person undergoer desinence *-u* and is therefore often not perceptible. The indicative past tense marker *-(h)e* is ungrammatical in embedded clauses:[4]

(8) a. nam kus-a-lo (*kus-e-lo) kam cog-he-ŋa.
sun set-SUBJ-COM set-PT-COM work do-PT-e
'I worked till sun-set.'

b. maʔi khoŋs-a-ha (*khoŋs-e-ha) nis-e-ŋ.
person play-SUBJ-N play-PT-N see-PT-1sA
'I saw the person playing.'

This is different with non-embedded nominalization. In line with their independent status, they can appear in either the indicative or the subjunctive mood. Thus, apart from sentences in *-a* as in (4b) above, one encounters nominalizations with *-e*, although less commonly so:

(9) pheŋsaŋ-do ŋ-khar-e-ha mu!
left-ID 3ns-go-PT-N OBV
'But clearly it was to the left that he went!'

The difference between subjunctive and indicative is delicate to assess in this context. Indicative forms seem to have an additional flavor of 'immediacy', but language

consultants remain completely agnostic and more light can be brought on the issue only by further discourse analysis.

In Athpare too, non-embedded nominalizations permit a broader range of verb inflection than their embedded counterparts. In particular, the former allow suffixing the finite tense markers *-e* 'PT' and *-t* 'NPT' while the latter, like all other subordinate clauses, do not (see Ebert 1997: 131). In Limbu, by contrast, nominalizations have the same inflectional potential in embedded and non-embedded usage.

The embedded status of relative clauses is important to notice even in the limiting case where the matrix clause consists of a single pronoun, which moreover can be dropped. This is illustrated by the following examples, which consist each of two NPs linked together to form an equational sentence:

(10) a. ŋka yaŋ nak-cai-ʔ-ŋa-ha.
1s DISTR ask-eat-NPT-e-N
'I am one who begs and eats [what he gets].'

b. kam cou-t-i-ha, ŋke!
work do-NPT-1p-N 1pi
'We are [people] who work!'

When the pronoun is dropped, the equational structure can only be guessed from the context:

(11) dud uŋŋ-het-kha i?
milk drink-TEMP-N Q
'[Is it one] that still drinks milk?'

Equational sentences do not need a copula in Kiranti languages.[5] This is not only true of the preceding examples in (10) and (11) but also of simple nouns in predicative position:

(12) un mastar
3s teacher
'S/he is a teacher.'

Occasionally, however, one does get overt copular verbs adding further aspecto-temporal or modal specifications. This is equally possible with predicate NPs consisting of relative clauses (13a) and of simple nouns (13b):

(13) a. u-sakha mai-kha n-liu-ŋat-ni-ulo.
3POSS-branch lack-NPT:N NEG-be(come)-RP-NEG-CP
'But he hasn't become one whose lineage lacks (i.e., has died out).'

b. ŋka n-cha lis-e-ŋa.
1s 2POSS-child be(come)-PT-e
'[Suppose] I would be your child.'

At the functional core of relative clauses lies the specification of a referent by supplying information about it. If there is an overt head, it must be semantically suitable for this kind of specification. An unsuitable head is, for instance, a question word or a demonstrative, which designate variables, not referents. This is why sentences like the following cannot receive a relative-clause interpretation (14a) and defy paraphrasing by means of a prenominal structure (14b):

(14) a. emu lis-e-k-kha?
how be(come)-PT-2-N
'How was it?!'

b. *lis-a-k-kha emu
be(come)-SUBJ-2-N how
'*which manner in which it was'.

Universally, a prime means for manipulating referential values and specifications is determiners or articles. The Kiranti languages under consideration all have such a device. Unlike what we are used to in modern European languages, however, this article is usually not attached to the head noun but to the attribute (Belhare examples):

(15) a. tu-na khim (**tu khim-na*)
up-ART house
'the house up there'

b. tu-kha khim
up-N house
'a house up there'

In this, the Kiranti article is strongly reminiscent of postpositional uses of articles in Ancient Greek (16a), which in some dialects can introduce full-fledged relative clauses (16b) (cf. Seiler 1960):

(16) a. hē gunḕ hē paroûsa
ART:NOMsFEM woman:NOMsFEM ART:NOMsFEM be.present:AP:NOMsFEM
'the present woman'

b. ou d’ Agamémnōn lêg’ éridos tẽn prôto
NEG but A.:NOMs let.off:3sAOR fight:GENsFEM ART:ACCsFEM before
e-pēpeílēs’ Akhilêi. <Homer, *Ilias* 1, 318f>
PT-menace-3sAOR A.-DAT
‘But Agamemnon did not let off from the fight with which he threatened Akhileus before.’

The term ‘article’ derives from Latin *articulum*, a translation of Greek *árthron* ‘joint, link’, and originally referred to the function of linking an attribute to its head. This is precisely the function of the postpositional articles in (16) as much as of the suffixal articles in Kiranti languages. In Belhare, the article is *-na* in the singular, *-kha (~-khak* word-finally*)* in the plural, and *-khachi* in the dual. It signals that the NP in which it is found has specific reference. This holds for both prenominal and for internally headed relative clauses. Thus, if the context permits, either (7a), repeated here as (17a), or (17b) are possible, as much as their prenominal paraphrases in (17c) and (17d):

(17) a. asamba maʔi niu-s-u-ŋ-na-ŋa paisa khat-lott-he.
last.night person see-TRANS.PERF-3U-1sA-ART-ERG monney take-TEL-PT

b. asamba maʔi niu-s-u-ŋŋ-hak-ŋa paisa khat-lott-he.
last.night person see-TRANS.PERF-3U-1sA-N-ERG monney take-TEL-PT

c. asamba niu-s-u-ŋ-na maʔi-ŋa paisa khat-lott-he.
last.night see-TRANS.PERF-3U-1sA-ART person-ERG monney take-TEL-PT

d. asamba niu-s-u-ŋŋ-ha maʔi-ŋa paisa khat-lott-he.
last.night see-TRANS.PERF-3U-1sA-N person-ERG monney take-TEL-PT
‘The person I’ve seen last night took away the money.’

Independent sentence nominalizations, by constrast, do not allow such alternations.

Specific or definite articles are also characteristic of Athpare and Limbu, but in Athpare, the article is the only nominalization device available and cannot therefore discriminate between embedded and non-embedded nominalizations (see (3) above for an example and Section 4 for further discussion). Limbu allows the article on either the head or on the attribute, but not in non-embedded nominalizations.

(18) a. pheːnda-re ku-yumlakpɛ-n[6] kɛ-dzɔ-iː? <D43>
tomato-GEN 3POSS-pickle-ART 2-eat:3U-Q
‘Do you eat tomato *acār*?’

b. kɛ-mba-rɛ-n ku-boːdɛn hɛn? kɛ-mma-rɛ-n hɛn? <D39>
2POSS-father-GEN-ART 3POSS-status what 2POSS-mother-GEN-ART what
‘What is your father’s position in society? And what’s your mother’s?’

Apart from its flexible position, the Limbu article also differs from its Belhare and Athpare counterparts in that it does not substitute for a nominalizer, but instead follows it:

(19) a. dalo-o sa: yuks-u-ŋ-bɛ-n me-deʔr-u.
basket-LOC meat keep-3U-1sA-N-ART 3nsA-take-3U
'[The mice] took away the meat that I kept in the basket.'

b. sa:rik cuŋdzi:k gɔrɔ yəllik te:ʔl lumbhuʔl-o: ke:p-mʔna-bɛ-n
very cold if many clothes thunse-LOC put-PASS-N-ART
khap-maʔ bo:ŋ. <D78>
cover-INF EXIG
'If it's very cold, cover the *thunse* with lots of clothes wrapped around it.'

c. hɛkkesaŋ hara: kɛ-dum-ba wɛtcha mɛ-lett-u-ba-n mɛ-sups-u.[7]
even.then fast AP-ripe-AP rice 3nsA-plant-3U-N-ART 3nsA-gather-3U
'Even then, the fast ripening rice which they have planted they harvest.'

Notice that the only difference between (19) and the introductory example in (2b) is the article. With it, the sentence can only be understood as a relative clause, i.e., the article signals that there is a head noun, whose reference is being narrowed down (also cf. van Driem 1987: 195f).

3. Nominalization as focus marking in Belhare

Working on similar constructions in Yup'ik Eskimo, Woodbury (1985: 76) notes that independently used nominalizations often signal "vividness and sometimes exclamatory force". The same can be said of their Belhare equivalents. The reason is, I contend, that they are focus constructions. By this I understand a semantically complex construction that results from the superposition of two propositions in the following manner (see Jackendoff 1972, Bearth 1992, Lambrecht 1994, among many others). The semantic structure of a sentence like (20a) consists of a proposition with an open variable **x** (20b) and one that instantiates or re-instantiates the value of **x** (20c):

(20) a. It's Hari who is coming.
b. Someone is coming. (i.e., **Fx**)
c. It's Hari. (i.e., **x = a**)

A focus construction thus consists of a presupposed part, i.e., information that is deemed accessible to the addressee, and an asserted (or questioned) part, i.e., information that the speaker assumes not to be shared by the addressee. The presupposed proposition (**Fx**) can be contained within the utterance itself, as is the case in our example. But it can also be derived from the pragmatic context, for example, when (20c) follows a knock on the door that the speakers assumes to have been noticed by the addressee (Bearth 1987). In Belhare, an overtly expressed presupposition is mostly marked by the subjunctive mood: the core function of this mood is to block off the scope of main clause illocutionary force (Bickel 1996: 91 – 102), and this perfectly fits the semantics of a presupposition. However, the subjunctive mood is available only in the past, and, moreover, it forms with the indicative form a privative rather than an equipollent opposition. It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that apart from subjunctive forms, we also get indicative forms, if only less frequently (see
(9) above). As for the assertive part of focus constructions, variable-instantiation ('**x=a**') is overtly signalled in (20) by an equational mini-clause (*it is*) that 'clefts' the sentence. No such clause is needed in Belhare since, as we have seen in the preceding section, this language does not require copulas in equational structures.

Using a focus construction is a complex move in discourse. It requires that the speaker has successfully separated information which s/he can taken for granted from information which s/he cannot assume to be shared by the addresse. Such operations are fundamental for all of conversation. However, when using a focus construction, speakers cannot carry out these operations privately as, say, a chess-player can silently think about a strategy. Instead, the very use of overt focus-marking directly indexes the cognitive process that it requires — in other words, focus-marking necessarily lays bare the speaker's assumption about what the addressee has in common and what s/he does not share with him or her. Most importantly, a focus construction signals the speaker's hightened concern with a particular instantiation of a variable as one that competes with other possible instantiations (as in contrastive focus) or that is not evident by itself (as in completive focus) (see Bearth 1987, 1992, 1998).[8] As a result of this, focus constructions typically announce a strong authorial position, which in turn has an intrinsic potential for controversy. This is why focus constructions are perspicously characteristic of "vivid" discourse in Yup'ik and Belhare or, for that matter, in any other language. In the following, I show that nominalized independent sentences in Belhare assume precisely these qualities of focus constructions. I first take up assertive and then interrogative speech acts.

In assertive speech acts, focus-marking by means of nominalization is often contrastive and directly marks controversial positions. The following sentence serves to reject a proposition previously made by the interlocutor:

(21) hale mand-u-ŋŋ-ha!
earlier finish-3U-1sA-N
'It's earlier that I finished!'

While in this example, the focused element (the controversial variable) is an adverb, NPs too can be focussed by nominalizing the sentence. Again, the marking signals a potentially controversial variable-instantiation:

(22) abo na mand-a-ha makkha i?
now DEM finish-SUBJ-N not Q
'Now this one (not all of them) is finished, isn't it?'

Since the construction does not designate any element as the privileged place of focus, even the whole proposition itself can be focused, and this figures among the most frequent uses of Belhare nominalizations. As Matisoff (1972) observed with regard to Lahu (Loloish, Tibeto-Burman), nominalization "objectifies and reifies" a proposition. This makes it possible for the proposition to instantiate a controversial discourse variable:

(23) a. male,i-gira sabun nak-si uŋs-a-ŋŋ-ha.
no one-HUM soap ask.for-SUP come.down-SUBJ-e-N
'No, it's in order to ask for soap that I've come down here.'

b. A: endua kha?-yu?
when go-NPT
'When does she go?'

B: asen-ba tai-ŋa-ha, ŋ-khat-ket-ni-ha.
yesterday-LOC come-INTR.PERF-PERF 3ns-go-INC-NEG
'She has come yesterday. She is not going already now!'

In (23a), the variable is the reason of the speaker's presence. It is instantiated by an embedded purpose clause that rejects alternative ideas previously insinuated by the interlocutor. The answer in (23b) emphatically rejects the interlocutor's suggestion that a visitor might be leaving the village again.

Nominalization can also be used for completive focus. Like in contrastive focus, the nominalization lends the proposition special authority, without, however, signalling controversy. The force of the construction lies in demonstrating that the speaker vouches for his or her proposition as the optimal choice for instantiating an open variable. The following proposition is offered in response to somebody being astonished by the fact that the speaker looks so tired. By nominalizing the clause, the speaker claims her proposition to be the definite answer to the question:

(24) hamba Dhankuta khar-a-ŋŋ-ha, rak-khar-e-ŋa, ŋka!
today Dh. go-SUBJ-e-N tired-TEL-PT-e 1s
I went to Dhankuta today. [That's why] I got tired!

The explanatory note associated with this example is a fairly common pragmatic side-effect of completive proposition focus. The effect is further illustrated by the following examples.

(25) a. ŋ-khem-get-ni-ŋŋ-ha.
NEG-hear-INC-NEG-1sA-N
'It's [because] I have never heard of it.'

b. lambu-cha-bu chakt-u-ha.
way-ADD-REP bar-3U-N
'It's [because] they closed the road.'

The authority-lending function of focus-constructions is particularly transparent in narratives. A typical instance is the following sentence, which ends a fairy-tale about a man-eater:

(26) lemlemm-a i-khe-bu ka-mett-a-ha.
man.eater-ERG DIST-MDEM-REP iU-cause-SUBJ-N
'That's how the man-eater treated us!'

After having recounted the tale, the narrator can now instantiate the variable 'how' which was the audience's presumed point of interest. By marking this instantiation as focused, the speaker signals that he claims authorial responsibility for it and vouches for his version of 'how it was'.

In narrative contexts, focus constructions sometimes serve to re-instantiate rather than to instantiate a variable. This is not only the case when a speaker corrects himself or herself (see Bearth 1992), but also when s/he is not sure whether a previous instantiation of a core variable is enough well-established to continue a narration. This is indeed another prominent function of focus constructions in Belhare narratives. The construction is not used to fill a presumed gap in the addressee's knowledge (as in completive focus) or to reject what is perceived to be a wrong variable-instantiation (as in constrastive focus). Instead, the construction serves to ascertain that the audience is fully aware of the proposition and does not doubt it any further. In the following example, the proposition *bihabu barobari nliyakthebundo* 'they marry each other on an equal basis' is first introduced without nominalization (but with the particle *-ndo* which signals that the clause contradicts general presuppositions). Later in the text, the narrator takes up the

same proposition, but now in a focus construction. By so doing, he makes sure that the audience "got the point" that is essential for understanding the narrative:

(27) poila-na-bu maŋ-lo manua-lo barobari mun dhup-yakt-he
first-TOP-REP deity-COM human-COM equal talk-IPFV-PT

biha-bu barobari n-li-yakt-he-bu-ndo. huᵊdakheri khe
marriage-REP equal 3ns-be-IPFV-PT-REP-CP and.then MDEM

maŋ-ŋa cok-kaiʔ-s-u-ha-ro ŋke-a-cha
deity-ERG do-UP-TR.PERF-3P-N-ID 1pi-ERG-ADD

cou-t-u-m-no. abo poile ramaŋ n-cok-yakt-he, hʌgiʔ
do-NPT-3U-1pA-CONF now before R. 3ns-do-IPFV-PT OK

abo maŋ-lo manua-lok-phu biha bari n-cog-a-ha.
now deity-COM human-COM-REP marriage ECHO 3ns-do-SUBJ-N

maŋŋ-ha u-cha manua-ŋa tar-he ki...
deity-N 3POSS-child human-ERG bring-PT SEQ

'Before, gods and humans used to talk to each other and to marry each other on an equal basis. But then, after all we do the same things as the gods have been doing forever (lit., up from [the past]). Well, in earlier times, they used to do the hunting ritual *ramaŋ*, right? Now, it's that gods and humans inter-married. So, a girl of a god was married (lit., brought) by a human and then...' [follows the account of how the human went hunting with the gods].

In questions, focus constructions typically announce controversy. They signal that the speaker is ready at the outset to challenge any variable-instantiation that the addressee might supply. In other words, the speaker does not simply want an answer but s/he also intends the range of possible instantiations to be the topic of a controversial discussion:

(28) a. male, ika choĩ-kak-kha?
INIT why refuse-NPT:2-N

'Hey, why is it that you refuse!?' (i.e., you should accept!)

b. yeti hisap cok-kon-u-ha?
what calculation do-SDT-3U-N

'But what is she making calculations while passing by?'

c. m-maĩ-t-u-ha-bu i?
3nsA-finish-NPT-N-REP Q

'Will they really finish [the field] (as they say)?!' (i.e., I doubt it.)

d. A: ŋ-waũ-ʔ-ni-ro, ŋka-ha.
NEG-fit.in-NPT-NEG-ID 1s-GEN

'It won't fit in, mine.'

B: emu ŋ-waũ-ʔ-ni-ha?!
how NEG-fit-NPT-NEG-N
'How should it not fit in?!' (i.e., it must fit in!)

e. A: han-na Kathmandu-e sʌppe wai-ka uŋ?
2s-TOP K.-LOC all wander.about-NPT:2 RHQ
'You get around all [places] in Kathmandu, don't you?'

B: sʌppe makkha
all not
'Not all of it.'

C: sʌppe ke was-a hiu-t-i-ha?!
all what wander.about-SUBJbe.able-NPT-1p-N
'How could one[9] be able to get around at all [places]?!' (i.e., one isn't able!)

In (28a), the speaker implies that he is convinced that the addresse won't be able to put forward a satisfactory answer. In (28b), any answer to the question is deemed controversial: no one is assumed to be able to provide a straightforward explanation for what people think is an odd behavior of a woman making calculations on the street. The suspicion is that she made some business and everyone would like to know about. In short, focus-marking is a perfect trigger of gossiping, which indeed followed the question in the example. The controversy-inducing function is also very prominent in (28c–e), where in each case the whole purpose of the question lies in challenging previous assumptions.

Just as in assertive speech acts, focus constructions can serve to re-instantiate rather than instantiate variables in questions. The following utterance requests the repetition of a particular instantiation, viz. the identification of a photograph:

(29) bhia-ek-kha he-na ceg-he-i-k-kha?
marriage-LOC-N which-ART say-PT-2p-2-N
'Which one did you say is from the marriage?'

By focusing the question, the speaker indicates that the instantiation is all but obvious, i.e., not easy to agree on. No such additional meaning would be conveyed if the verb were not nominalized (i.e., *cegheiga* instead of *cegheikkha*)

The potential disagreement underlying most uses of focus constructions is often further underlined by discourse particles. Indeed, when asked in isolation, consultants often hesitate to accept focus construction without adding one of these markers. In assertive speech acts, a commonly used particle is *mu* 'obviously', which indicates that the speaker takes his or her own position to be obvious and natural:

(30) a. riŋ cin-ma khei-kha mu!
language teach-INF must-NPT:N OBV
'Of course one must teach the language!'

b. i-baŋ ma-yu, arko honn-hai?-kha mu!
one-HUM lack-NPT other appear-TEL-NPT:N OBV
'One [of them] is missing. [Therefore] it must be another one who showed up.'

The interjection *helo* in the following example has an exclamatory force and signals that the speaker strongly rejects the interlocutor's suggestion. Like *mu*, *helo* is fairly common with nominalized sentences:

(31) A: ek rat huŋ-cha sitd-e yuŋ-he-i-ga i?
one night TOP-ADD site-LOC stay-PT-2p-2 Q
'And for just one night you stayed on the site?'

B: helo yuŋ-he-i-ŋa-ha!
NEG.EXCLAM stay-PT-1p-e-N
'What do you think we stayed!' (i.e., we didn't stay at all!)

Another common particle is the loan-interjection *raicha*, which basically signals recent discovery and surprise, much as in the source language Nepali. With focus constructions, *raicha* has the additional connotation that the speaker's position is again the most natural one — not unlike the meaning of *mu*. The speaker's proposition is portrayed as being simply 'out there', for everybody to discover:

(32) a. kam cok-ca-ma thuu-kha raicha.
work do-eat-INF hurt-NPT:N DISC
'It seems that it's hard to make one's living!'

b. lu! nʌ! abo n-niũa ti-rend-he-k-kha raicha, khat-ka-tlo!
INTERJ now 2POSS-mind please-TEL-PT-2-NDISC go-2-RESTR
'Oh well, it now seems that you really like her, [so] just go!'

In questions, the most common particle is *lou*, a loan-interjection from Nepali indicating surprise (33a), but also emphatic vowel-raising can do (33b):

(33) a. na he-llamma hi?wa tai-kha lou!
DEM where-MED wind come-NPT:N SURPR
'But where is it that this wind comes from?!'

b. daju-chi he-ne ŋ-khat-ket-chi-ha-u!
brother-ns where-LOC 3ns-go-INC-d-N-EMPH
'But where is it that the two brothers are going to?'

4. From focus to constative and imperfective meaning

The structure of the interrogative examples in (32) and (33) is reminiscent of French, where questions are typically formed by adding a clefting proposition *est-ce que,* literally 'is-it that'. Both French and Belhare use a nominalizing element — French the complementizer *que*, Belhare the suffix *-(k)ha(k)* — but, since Belhare does not need copulas nor dummy pronouns, there is no equivalent of *est-ce*. The use of nominalizing devices in questions is not obligatory in either language. However, the closest relative of Belhare, Athpare, further grammaticalized the construction and now seems to obligatorily nominalize all questions (Ebert 1997: 111f):

(34) khan-na hit-na-ga suga-ci a-nis-u-c-e-g-i?
2-ERG DIST-DEM-nsART parrot-ns 2-see-3U-nsU-PT-nsART-Q
'Did you see those parrots?'

This is a natural development, since question words are inherently focused. In terms of the schema set out in (20), the question word represents the variable **x** whose instantiation is sought. Since the marking is virtually obligatory, however, the discourse function of stimulating controversy fades away. The focus marker is no longer under pragmatic but under grammatical control, to adopt Hyman & Watters's (1984) terminology.

In its other uses, too, Athpare nominalization seems to have slightly broadened its functional range if compared to Belhare. We saw in the preceding section that whole propositions can be focused, serving thereby as the (re-)instantiation of a controversial discourse variable. In (27) above, for example, the focus construction reinstantiates the proposition as a given fact, as something "that is the case" (cf. Matisoff 1972, Kölver 1977, van Driem 1993). This function is pragmatically similar to what aspectologists call the "denotative" or "constative" function of aspect (in Russian aspectology, *obščefaktičeskoe značenie* 'general-factual meaning'). In this case, nominalization portrays propositions as "a matter of fact", and this appears to be a prominent use in Athpare (cf. Ebert 1997: 131):

(35) A: khan-na aŋgreji riŋ a-nis-u-t-u-n-i?
2-ERG English language 2-know-3U-NPT-3U-ART-Q
'Do you kwow English?'

B: nis-u-ŋ-na.
know-3U-1sA-ART
'I do (it's the case).'

What is focused here is the truth value or 'polarity' of the proposition. In line with this, statements with reversed polarity are almost always nominalized too (Ebert 1997: 132):

(36) ni-natni-ŋ-na
see-NEG:PT-1s-ART
'I didn't see it.'

A negative statement has an inherent potential for focus-marking because it rejects an alternative variable-instantiation: something which might have been the case turns out not to be the case.[10]

The singular vs. nonsingular opposition encoded by the article can be exploited in focus and "matter-of-fact" (constative) constructions. Used in a focus construction, the choice of the article indexes the number of the focused element (cf. (34) above), in the same way as it would register the number of the internal head in a relative constructions. In constative use, the singular vs. nonsingular opposition bears on the number of events as it were. As a result, general truths, which indicate an infinite series of possible situations, are marked by the nonsingular article. Note that English, too, often allows plural morphology in such cases (Ebert 1997: 133):

(37) a. ka-phu-ba lotniŋ phuy-u-ga
AP-sow-AP clothing sew-3U-nsART
'The tailor sows clothes.' or 'Tailors sow clothes.'

b. li-ni-ga
be(come)-NEG-nsART
'This will never happen.'

From an aspectological viewpoint, the most important property of constative uses is that they neutralize the perfective vs. imperfective distinction (see, among many others, Jakobson 1932, Johanson 1971, Maslov 1974, Comrie 1976, Bickel 1996). However, in some languages the constative function is covered by the same morphology as the imperfective aspect. This is notably the case in most Slavic languages, where the imperfective form not only signals the active suppresion of situation boundaries, but also the irrelevance of such boundaries. The text-book example in (38) illustrates this:

(38) Vy čita-l-i 'Vojnu i mir?'
2p read:IPFV-PT-p war:ACC and peace:ACC
'Have you [ever] read 'War and Peace'?

In choosing the non-perfective form, the speaker signals that s/he is not so much concerned with whether or not the addressee finished the book, but rather with the simple state of affairs (Comrie 1976: 113). English (or, for that matter, Nepali) typically uses the perfect in translation.

Thus, in Slavic, the negative value of the feature [perfective], i.e., [–perfective], is covered by the same marker as its unmarked or neutral value, i.e., –[perfective]. It appears that a similar conflation is found in Limbu. Apart from its relative-clause function (illustrated by (2) and (19) in the preceding), the nominalizer *-pa* covers, like Belhare and Athpare, focus constructions:

(39) a. hɛnaŋ kɛ-bhɛr-ɛ-baʔ — khɛni saʔ-se. <D112>
why 2-come-PT-N 2p visit-SUP
'Why is that you have come?' — 'To see you guys.'

b. kɛ-ips-ɛ-tchi-ba-iːʔ <D90>
2-sleep-PT-d-N-Q
'Have you fallen asleep?' (i.e., 'Are you sleeping?')

Unlike the other two languages, however, Limbu *-pa* also appears to mark imperfective aspect. This is evident from the fact that *-pa* induces a conative reading if combined with telic verbs:

(40) a. phoːks-u-ŋ-ba mɛ-boːg-ɛ-n.
wake.up(trans.)-3U-1sA-IPFV NEG-wake.up(intrans.)-PT-NEG
andoː andoː phoːks-u-ŋ. <D109>
later later wake.up(trans.)-3U-1sA
'I tried to wake him up, but he didn't wake up. I'll wake him up later.'

b. phaːks-u-ŋ-ba mɛ-baːks-ɛ-n. <D109>
untie-3P-1sA-IPFV NEG-come.undone-PT-NEG
'I tried to untie [the knot], but it didn't come undone.'

Example (41a) is in minimal contrast with the internal-head relative construction in (19), repeated here as (41b):

(41) a. dalo-o saːn yuks-u-ŋ-ba me-deʔr-u.
basket-LOC meat-ART keep-3U-1sA-IPFV 3nsA-take-3U
'I was keeping the meat in the basket. But [the mice] took it.'

b. dalo-o saː yuks-u-ŋ-ba-ːn me-deʔr-u.
basket-LOC meat keep-3U-1sA-N-ART 3nsA-take-3P
'[The mice] took away the meat that I kept in the basket.'

Inside a relative clause, the head noun cannot be marked as having definite or specific reference (a non-restrictive relative clause interpretation does not seem to be available in these constructions). This is why the article *-ːn* on *saː* 'meat' in (41a) entails an imperfective reading. According to Tej Mān Ȧṅdembe (pers. comm., 1994), (41a) clearly has a conative if not frustrative meaning that is absent from (41b).

Another property of the imperfective that distinguishes it from other uses of *-pa* is that the Limbu imperfective is incompatible with "stative" predicates (van Driem 1987, 1993). This is the reason why examples like (39b) can only be understood as focus constructions. If *-pa* had a [–perfective] value, one would expect 'were you asleep?' as the translation. "Stative" predicates like *imma?* 'to sleep' are in fact ingressive-stative ("telic-stative" in van Driem's terminology). As such, they include an initial boundary (in the example, the moment of falling asleep) that can be brought to the fore in non-imperfective forms. This is exactly what we get in (39b).

How did the conflation of imperfective and constative come about in Limbu? Notice that it is unlikely to be a mere issue of markedness, where the unmarked value ('–[α]') merges with the negative value ('[–α]'). Unlike Slavic languages, Limbu has no overtly marked [+perfective] form that would force a competing neutral form (i.e., the nominalizer) to acquire [–perfective] as the default implicature. Thus, the source of the aspectual system is more likely to lie in the nominalizer itself. As we saw in the case of Belhare, the focusing force of the nominalizer can bear on virtually any constituent, the proposition itself among them. The following example illustrates this for Limbu:

(42) A: kɛ-na-ːn kɛ-hɔpt-w-iːʔ
2-face-ART 2-wash-3U-Q
'Did you wash your face?'

B: hɔpt-u-ŋ-ba.
wash-3U-1sA-N
'I did.'

Van Driem (1987: 111) observes that in this example, *hɔptuŋba* "merely maintains that the action has taken place at some time in the past" and "does not deny the inquirer's insinuation that the result of the action does not obtain". What is focused is the truth value or polarity of the proposition, similar to what we observed in the Athpare examples (35) and (36). Polarity, however, is only one among the many propositional operators that can fall under the scope of focus-marking.[11] As shown by Hyman & Watters (1984) for other languages, aspect is another operator that can be focused, and many African languages have indeed developed markers of imperfective or progressive aspect out of

focus markers. It is likely that Limbu underwent the same development. Instead of focusing on the polarity of the predication (*he does work*), the nominalizer comes to focus on the internal time structure of the predication (*he is (now) working*). This receives a natural interpretation in a 'selection theory' of aspect as recently developed by, among others, Breu (1984, 1994), Sasse (1991a,1991b), and Bickel (1996, 1997, in press-b). In this theory, aspect-marking is explicated as the selection or highlighting of particular phases or boundaries encoded by the predicate. Imperfective aspect selects phases, perfective aspect boundaries. Thus, in the examples in (40) and (41), the nominalizers focuses and therefore selects the process or phase leading to a result without also selecting the final boundary (*télos*) contained by the predicate. This explains why the clauses entail only that the processes started and why their results can be explicitly denied in a subsequent clause without contradiction. Notice that from this point of view, focusing a phase in the predicate's inherent time structure — its *Aktionsart* — and marking imperfective aspect is exactly the same phenomenon, and the question whether we are dealing with 'aspect' or 'focus' becomes a non-issue. A 'pure' aspect marker can be analyzed, then, as a marker that focuses predicate phases (imperfective aspect) or boundaries (perfective aspect) to the exclusion of other operators and constituents.

The aspectual readings in the Limbu examples in (40) and (41) are unavailable with the Belhare nominalizer. They are at the core, however, of the 'pure' imperfective marker *-yakt*. This marker etymologically derives, in parallel with uncountable other languages all around the globe, from a verb meaning 'stay' (see Bickel 1996 for discussion):

(43) a. pok-yakt-he(*tʌrʌ m-pokg-at-ni.)
rise-IPFV-PT but NEG-rise-PT-NEG
'He was getting up (but didn't get up completely).'

b. ip-yakt-he (tʌrʌ ŋŋ-ipb-at-ni.)
get.full-IPFV-PT but NEG-get.full-PT-NEG
'It was about to get full (but didn't).'

Thus, unlike Slavic languages or Limbu, Belhare makes a strict distinction between the imperfective aspect in a narrow sense (defined as [–perfective]) and the constative function (–[perfective]). Further proof of this distinction is that with punctual verbs, the imperfective entails iteration, whereas the nominalizer simply portrays an event as a matter of fact:

(44) a. ma-yakt-he.
get.lost-IPFV-PT
'It got lost again and again.'

b. mas-e-ha.
get.lost-PT-N
'It's that/because it got lost!'

Distinct as they are, a nominalizer in constative or proposition-focus function is perfectly compatible with an imperfective aspect marker. One example of this is (4b) in the introduction; a more elaborate is the following, where the nominalizer is used in the same way as in example (27) above.

(45) hetterika, dher yeti-ha na-leŋ cums-u-m-cha
EXCLAM much what-GEN DEM-DIR bind.up-3U-1pA-ADD
i-na-leŋ jatan mett-u-m-cha we-yau-etlo. [...]
DIST-DEM-DIR busy do-3U-1pA-ADD spill.over-IPFV:NPT-RESTR
i-ne-e we-yakt-a-ha, i-khe-ʔwa cum cum
DIST-DEM-LOC spill.over-IPFV-SUBJ-N DIST-MDEM-LIKE bundle bundle
m-meʔ-yakt-u-ha. n-co-cha m-maĩ-ya-at-ni-bu.
3nsA-do-IPFV-1pA-N 3ns-eat:3U-ADD NEG-finish-IPFV-PT-NEG-REP
'Oh my God! [The paddy] just keeps spilling over, even if we bind it together on this side and are busy with it on that side. [...]
Indeed there it kept spilling over and like that ((gesturing)) they were making bundles. Even when they ate it, it never ended.'

The narrator first describes how abundance of rice came about through a divine spell. For this, he uses free indirect style with imperfective forms in the historical present. A few moments later he takes up this crucial point again, now framed in nominalized clauses. By using this stylistic device, he re-instantiates the event variable, emphasizing that the scene should by now be well established in the mind of the audience.

5. Conclusion

In the languages we looked at in this chapter, focus-marking appears to be at the functional core of main clause nominalizations. The single most important further development of this is the emergence of imperfective aspect in Limbu. This, I suggest, derives from using the nominalizer for propositional operator focus. The result is a morphological conflation of imperfective and constative meaning that has a typological parallel in Slavic languages. It is important to notice, however, that this pattern is by no means universal. Turkish, for instance, is known to conflate the constative function with the simple ('perfective') rather than the imperfective aspect (see Johanson 1971), and in

the preceding, we saw that Belhare too keeps the constative function strictly separate from the imperfective aspect.

Abbreviations

A ‘actor (transitive subject)’, ACC ‘accusative’, ACCEL ‘accelerative Aktionsart modifier’, ADD ‘additive focus (even, also)’, AOR ‘aorist’, AP ‘active participle’, ART ‘article’, CAUS ‘causative’, COM ‘comitative case’, CONF ‘confirmatory particle’, CP ‘contrapresuppositional focus’, DAT ‘dative’, DEM ‘demonstrative’, DIR ‘directional case’, DISC ‘recent discovery particle’, DIST ‘distal’, DISTR ‘distributive’, e ‘exclusive’, ERG ‘ergative’, EXIG ‘exigency particle’, FEM ‘feminine’, GEN ‘genitive’, HUM ‘human’, i ‘inclusive’, ID ‘identifier’, INC ‘inceptive’, INF ‘infinitive’, INSTR ‘instrumental’, INTR ‘intransitive’, IPFV ‘imperfective’, LOC ‘locative’, MDEM ‘modal demonstrative’, MED ‘mediative (*via*) case’, N ‘nominalizer, marker of nominal status’, NEG ‘negative’, NOM ‘nominative’, NPT ‘non-past’, ns ‘non-singular’, OBV ‘obvious fact particle’, p ‘plural’, PASS ‘passive’, PERF ‘perfect’, POSS ‘possessive’, PT ‘past’, Q ‘interrogative’, REP ‘report particle’, RESTR ‘restrictive focus’, RHQ ‘rhethorical question marker’, RP ‘resultative perfect’, s ‘singular’, SDT ‘spatially distributed temporary aspect’, SEQ ‘sequential marker’, SUBJ ‘subjunctive past mood’, SUP ‘supine (purpose form)’, SURPR ‘surprise particle’, TEL ‘telic Aktionsart’, TEMP ‘temporary aspect’, TOP ‘topic marker’, TRANS ‘transitive’, U ‘undergoer (object)’

Notes

This chapter is a thoroughly revised and translated version of parts of Bickel (1995). I am much indebted to the editor for giving me the opportunity to recycle these thoughts in English. In the original article, I also discuss constraints on the syntactic function of heads inside relative clauses. An English version of that discussion is available in summarized form in Bickel (in press-a). While the Belhare data are based on my fieldwork, Limbu examples were in part provided by Tej Mān Ȧṅdembe, who also helped me clarify various aspects of Limbu grammar back in 1994. Other data are from published sources, marked as ‘<D##>’ and ‘<E##>’, with ## indicating the page number in van Driem (1987) and Ebert (1997), respectively. Apart from Tej Mān Ȧṅdembe, I would like to thank my main consultant in Belhārā, Lekh Bahādur Rāī for his generous help and hospitality. Many thanks also go to T. Bearth and Jeff Webster for helpful comments on an earlier draft and for pointing me to useful literature. I am alone responsible, of course, for all remaining misconceptions.

[1] perhaps even ‘Standard Asian Nominalization’, as the pattern seems to pervade other Asian languages, too. The broader typological picture is still to be painted.
[2] In Athpare and Belhare, the Tibeto-Burman etymon *-*pa* only derives nonfinite, participle-like expressions.
[3] from *-t-kha* ‘NPT-N’, whence the stop-initial allomorph of the nominalizer.
[4] See Bickel (1996: 91 – 102) for the over-all semantics of the subjunctive vs. indicative distinction.
[5] But note that Belhare has an identificatory focus marker that can function as an emphatic copula: *un mastar-do* ‘he IS teacher’. The exact distribution of this marker must be left for another treatise, though.
[6] The article raises preceding /a/ in certain environments; see van Driem (1987: 36).
[7] This example was kindly provided to me by Jeff Webster. It is taken from a narrative in the Pāchthare dialect, where the suffixed article does not induce vowel raising as in the Phedāppe dialect used in all other examples.
[8] This is of course true only of focus marking that is, in Hyman & Watters’s (1984) terminology, under pragmatic control. See Section 4 below for focus-marking under grammatical control.
[9] In Kiranti languages, impersonal reference is usually indicated by first person plural inclusive markers.
[10] A semantic analysis of negation along these lines has been first proposed by the famous Buddhist logician Dharmakīrti in the 7th century AD (see Stcherbatsky 1984).
[11] An analysis of Limbu *-pa* based on variable scope was first proposed by van Driem (1995), without, however, connecting *-pa* to focus constructions.

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